

Varnish by 7devils

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Byeler - Freeform, Fluff, Gay Will Byers, Homophobic Slurs, Implied/Referenced Homophobia, M/M, Will-centric, but im saying it now so its law, i mean its never explicitly said, i wrote a 4k word long fic about will and nail polish, i'm sure the duffer brothers can write a couple episodes of happy will, jonathon is mentioned briefly, let will be happy, max is mentioned briefly

Language: English

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Summary:

"It's no secret that Will is attracted to colorful things, and a plastic make-up bag made no difference to him."

Basically, Will discovers and falls in love with nail polish.

Varnish

Author's Note:

I was serving an in-school suspension when I had the cutest fucking idea known to man. What if our son, Will Byers a.k.a. the sweetest little boy in any fictional universe, loved nail polish. Oh my god. So I wrote that.

If he ever gets caught, Will can honestly and sincerely use curiosity in his defense. He had been looking for a band-aid (He had acquired a stinging papercut from shuffling through the mass of drawing paper on his desk in an attempt to organize it. Never happening again.) under the sink in the bathroom when he came across a clear makeup bag *full* of colors.

It's no secret that Will is attracted to colorful things, and a plastic bag made no difference to him. He immediately shut and locked the door, shuffling on his knees until he was in front of the open cabinet and falling softly onto his bum with a small 'oomf'. He opens the bag and pulls out the brightest red nail polish he's ever seen.

He's seen it on his mother before, a long time ago when she had an eye for glamorous things. Will cringes, the thought that Joyce doesn't have time to treat herself to luxuries even as small as nail polish making guilt momentarily rush through him. He goes to zip the bag up again, but he pauses when another color catches his eye.

He blames his artistic tendencies when he ends up with five streaks of different nail varnishes on the side of his foot. He blames his artists' need for perfection when he sneaks three colors into his room to get the shade on one of his pictures just right.

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He should've remembered that his mother notices everything. He was in his room with the contents of the beauty bag spilled out in front of him on his bed. He had used every color in the bag in various works of his, save for the two polishes he had to throw out because they

were crusty and had dried out from not being closed tightly enough, and while it was fun being innovative with materials, he figured he should try using the nail polish for what it was intended.

The first shade he brushed on his pinkie was a pale purple he had used as a highlight color for a portrait of el in her snow ball dress. It was currently hanging proudly in her room, right next to her own artwork portraying six stick figures nearly identical, save for one with fiery red hair, all holding hands with cheeky smiles. 'Friends' is spelled in pink crayon above them, and Will would be lying if he said he doesn't tear up even a little every time he sees it.

He's on his fourth nail when his mom knocks on his door, followed by a muffled, "Will? What's that smell?"

He freezes and glances with wide eyes at his sealed window.

"Shit, shit, shit," he whispers while trying to screw the cap back on the bottle without smudging the fresh paint on his nails.

"Will?" Joyce calls, a familiar undertone of worry laced in her voice. The door knob twists and then Will is standing behind his bed with a pile of nail polish bottles in his arms and Joyce is entering his room with a scrunched up nose.

"Why does it smell like pai- oh..." She trails off as she answers her own question. "Wha- uh. Where did you get those, honey?"

Will can feel his cheeks flush with embarrassment. "Um... the bathroom. I, uh-" He fumbles with all the bottles in his arms, and when they start falling he steps closer to his mattress to avoid the bottles breaking on his floor and making a mess. "I wanted to use them for my drawings, ah- crap."

Joyce is next to him and picking up the fallen bottles with an amused smile on her face.

"This is why we use the bag, baby," She pulls the bag closer and starts dropping the bottles in one by one. Will exhales in subtle relief and silently helps her, forgetting the paint on his nails until she's suddenly grabbing his hand in her gentle grasp and examining it. Her

lips are pressed into a slight frown, and the anxiety that was previously subdued by her smile and nicknames is flaring up and squeezing his lungs. Her eyes are narrowed and seem far away. Will doesn't recall a time when she's ever stared so intently at him, and it's scary enough to make him almost nauseous. Glancing into his eyes and then back at his shaking, clammy hand, she blinks and her expression smooths out. Will is about to start sputtering out an apology when Joyce finally speaks, gently releasing her hold on him.

"This shade of purple doesn't suit you, Will. Try a brighter color."

Will suddenly feels incapable of speech at that moment, only able to mutter out a quiet, "Okay." And then she's smiling at him again and she's not mad or confused, she's just zipping the bag up and making her way to the window to crack it open.

Will feels a rush of affection and love and happiness burst through him as he watches his mom continue on, as if the sight of her son wearing purple nail varnish isn't wrong or unnatural. And when he pictures her smile and gentle touch, Will starts to think that it really isn't.

Joyce leaves the bag on his desk and kisses his head before walking back out into the hallway, trying to get rid of the images of pale purple lips and grey skin and her lifeless son in her arms.

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His mom buys a new bottle of nail polish remover on her next trip to the store, and when Will and Jonathon start to help her unpack she hands Will the bottle and with a discreet wink she says, "Can you put this under the sink in the bathroom please, sweetie?"

He smiles and brings it to his room instead. It's Sunday, which means his mom is going to come in his room later and help him pick out a new color for the week. Last Sunday what was left of the old bottle that sat under the sink went to scrubbing the purple off of his finger nails, and Joyce suggested painting his toe nails so they wouldn't have to remove it so often since his shoes would cover them. He knows she has no problem with his painted nails, and neither does Jonathon, but wearing nail polish to school would make will even

more of a bully target than he already is. Joyce still shook with rage at the thought of her sweet boy being pushed around at school, but he constantly placates her by reassuring her that Mike, Dustin, and Lucas are always there to defend him, not to mention Max and her signature glare usually keep bullies off their backs, anyway.

He slides his socks off and wiggles his toes, admiring the warm orange varnish coating his nails. A small smirk plays at his lips as a thought crosses his mind.

You've had your time, African Sunset, but it's Royal Blue's turn now.

He picks up said nail color and presses it against his hand. "Pretty," he whispers.

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He didn't intend for Mike to find out, or any of his friends for that matter. He didn't really intend to keep it a secret, either. He really just wanted it to be his own thing, something personal that he wasn't obligated to share with anyone. His mom said that was called, "minding your own business," and he laughed because while, yeah, the group has some set boundaries, they still tell each other everything. There's barely any business being minded between the six of them.

That's why they all know the protocol for Will's nightmares.

Rule number one is try to wake him up as soon as you realize it's happening. It was just Will's luck that the night this particularly nasty nightmare came about was the night of a 13-hour campaign that lasted until 2 AM, meaning the four boys were practically dead in their sleep. Mike only roused when Will's arm thumped hard against his throat and promptly choked him awake. By then Will was drenched in sweat and tears, and Mike kicked Lucas awake from scrambling out of his sleeping bag so fast. He gripped Will's shoulders and repeated Will's name in a loud, steady voice until, finally after a shake or two, Will gasped awake.

Rule number two: Wait until he speaks up before taking further action. Will is wrapped up in Mike's arms, and Mike ignores the

dampness of his sweater against his hands, the tears tickling his neck, the sharpness of Will's nails digging into his back and just holds him closer. He doesn't know what Will dreamt of this time, but whatever it was he trusts Will prefers the warm, solid, familiar body of his best friend. By now Lucas and Dustin were wide awake and leaning against each other, waiting for Will to recuperate. It takes a few minutes, but Will pulls away from the damp cave he created in the hollow of Mike's neck, wiping his face and glancing down at his drenched sweater and blanket. It's still quiet in the Wheeler basement, and then Will looks up at all three of them with a grimace on his face and mutters, "Gross." And Mike knows what that means.

Rule number three: If it's nasty, it's a shower. After a few seconds of quiet laughter pass Will's blunt comment, Mike stands and helps pull Will onto shaky feet. He turns back to Lucas and Dustin as he leads Will to the bathroom, "Can you guys throw that stuff in the washer and make a fresh bed? I'm gonna help Will."

Dustin scrunches up his nose and Lucas huffs out a "You would," that Mike pointedly ignores, but nonetheless they oblige.

Finally, number four, which is sort of a tag along to that particular rule number three, is do not leave Will alone. He will always insist he can take care of himself when the topic is brought up, especially when it comes to showering, but post-nightmare he's all too willing to let someone else run around him while his mind catches up to him, which doesn't take too long.

So Mike turns the shower head on, making sure it's as hot as it can go without burning Will, and helps him undress while it warms up. When he goes to pull off Will's socks, his toes curl and one foot steps back, effectively stopping Mike from reaching for them.

"Will? You okay?" He asks quietly from where he's squatting next to Will's legs. It should be awkward, this position, considering Will is completely naked, but this isn't the first time Mike has helped him clean up after a nightmare. It's not even the first time he's seen him naked. Being friends with someone for nine years, you're bound to see and know everything about each other. Besides, Mike doesn't think anything could pull his gaze away from Will's face right now.

He's flustered, which is odd considering the familiarity of the situation, and there's still a little gleam of fear in his wide expressive eyes. Mike easily reasons it's because of the nightmare that is the sole reason why any of this is happening right now. But Will isn't looking Mike in the eyes, he's staring resolutely at the wall, the mirror, the sink, the shower curtain, and oh yeah, he's refusing to take off his socks. "Will...?"

Will presses his lips together and sighs loudly through his nose, he seems to be willing himself to relax. Finally he looks back at Mike, who's still wholly confused, and just nods, stretching out a foot.

Mike slowly tilts his head back down and maintains eye contact until it's weird enough and his face starts to resemble an 'El-using-her-powers-and-being-generally-kickass' expression, which he really can't pull off, and reaches for Will's socked foot.

He pulls the sock off, and okay, well, now he sees why Will was being weird.

"You're wearing nail polish." He says intelligently.

Will huffs out a laugh and wiggles his toes, "I'm wearing nail polish."

Mike pulls off the other sock and stands, moving to open the curtain. He looks at Will's awkward stature and asks in a genuinely curious tone, "Why?"

Will side-steps Mike and enters the shower, letting the hot water wash over him for a moment and basking in the way his tense muscles begin to relax. He opens his eyes when a cool breeze brushes his thigh and raises an eyebrow at Mike who's still waiting for an answer. The words catch in his throat with every shift of Mike's gaze from one of his eyes to another, and he knows he won't be able to explain face to face. He pretends he pulled the curtain shut to trap the steam. He pushes the words out while he still can, short, quick, and to the point. "Because I like it."

Mike is quiet on the other side, mulling it over. He knows Will, and he knows he gets defensive about his hobbies like drawing or playing D&D, and his taste in music. He knows it stems from his time with

Lonnie, from his judging eyes and sneering comments about Will being too soft, too feminine. *A fag*, a voice that sounds like a seven-year-old choked up Will pipes up in the back of his head. *He called me a worthless fag, Mike.*

Mike lifts his lip in an angry snarl and picks up Will's clothes, tossing them in a pile outside the door before sitting on the closed toilet seat and grabbing a towel off the stack on the stool in the corner, playing with the edges.

Well, screw what Lonnie said, he isn't here for Will anymore, or Joyce or Jonathon for that matter, but we are. Will can like whatever he wants, we all can. Jonathon always tells us that. "Why do you like it?"

Will lets a small grateful smile tug on his lips as he squirts some shampoo in his hand. He's relieved that Mike doesn't sound grossed out or confused. Curious, maybe. "What's with all the questions? You sound like Holly, Mike."

"I do not!" Mike immediately retorts, then he smiles and taps the edge of the tub with his foot, "But really, how come? Cause it's shiny?"

"No," Will hums as he scrubs his hair, "I think I like the variety of the colors, and like, it lasts long and it doesn't smudge after it dries, and you can erase it with nail polish remover if you don't like it anymore or make a mistake. It's like, an artist's dream tool. It really just makes me happy."

Mike nods along as Will's explanation actually starts to make sense to him, pausing and smiling to himself at his last sentence. That's really all he wanted to hear. He rests his elbow on his knee and his head in his hand, listening and laughing as Will fumbles with the bar of soap and curses quietly. He studies the floor as he waits, but then he gets curious.

"Why blue?"

Will peeks around the curtain, soap dripping into his ear. "Huh?"

Mike looks at him then looks pointedly downwards wear his toes

would be, “Why that color?”

Will dips his head back under the water and runs his hands through his hair, closing his eyes and flexing his toes in the little pool of water at the bottom of the tub, “I dunno. It’s a rich color. Elegant, I mean. It’s, uh, it’s nice.”

Mike hums then stands up when Will pulls the curtain open and shuts off the water, opening the towel for Will to step into. He helps Will dry off his back and hair despite his quiet protests, then hands the towel to him to wrap around his waist.

He glances down at Will’s toes again and before he can stop it the first thought that comes to mind slips out of his mouth, “Yeah, it’s a nice color on you.”

Will blushes and smiles shyly up at him with his big brown eyes. He looks like he’s about to say something before an involuntary shiver makes the hair on his arms stand up, and Mike is already out the door to grab the biggest sweater he can find.

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When Joyce says she’s making a round to the drugstore for some more tooth paste and dish soap, Will pretends he’s eager to come because he’s in need of fresh air, and definitely not excited at the idea of ogling at brand new shades of Sally Henson nail polish.

Thankfully the store is completely empty save for the bored looking cashier popping bubblegum in her mouth at the register, so while Joyce is picking out what flavor tooth paste she wants, Will sneaks off two aisles down to the beauty section and takes a moment to just take in all the color. There’s a whole shelf filled top to bottom with lipstick, colors he’s never seen on girls are stocked and he wonders why no one in Hawkins is bold enough to wear blue or bright orange or black on their lips. He shakes his head slightly before moving down the aisle towards the nail polish and... *woah*.

Of course, he knew his mom didn’t have all of the nail polish in the world, but she still had a lot. Even so, compared to his mom’s collection (which is slowly more accurately becoming his collection)

this shelf of nail polish is easily ten times the size. There's probably 50 different shades of red alone. He bends down and looks through a row labelled 'Brand New!' and giggles at some of the names before suddenly his breath catches in his throat and he gasps.

He reaches out and picks up a bottle of polish, his eyes wide and filled with awe as he holds it up to the light. This nail polish *shimmers*. It has sparkles in it, and when he turns the bottle here and there, he can see the shimmer swirl and it reminds him of sugar in syrup and cotton candy and that strawberry body spray El likes to bring when she spends the night at his house. It's a deep pink magenta color and it's *beautiful*.

He's cradling it in his palm like he's found a lost treasure when he hears someone clear their throat behind him. He clutches the bottle tighter and hides it behind his back when he turns around before he realizes it's just his mother. His mother who's smiling and trying to peek around him.

"What's so amazing that it put stars in your eyes?" She bites her lip in an attempt to hide the huge grin that's threatening to spread across her face, but Will can see the amusement and joy in her eyes all the same. He rolls his eyes but he's got a smile playing on his lips and he slowly holds the bottle out to her.

"Oh wow!" She whisper-shouts and pulls it closer to inspect it, "It's got sparkles! This'll look cute on you."

Will sputters out a "huh?" and furrows his brows when Joyce puts the bottle in her basket.

"Mom, no, that's like two bucks--"

"I have some quarters at the bottom of my bag I can dig out--"

"*Mom,*"

"Will," she turns to him with a gentler smile and cradles his cheek, "It's nothing, alright? Two dollars, that's a steal!"

She grins cheekily and begins to walk towards the front. The tenderness in her eyes tells Will it isn't the bargain that has her mind

made up.

Will ducks his head with a bashful smile and follows his mom up to the register, the bounce in his step noticeable from a mile away.

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Will thought that because of the party's indifference to his painted nails the night of his nightmare that nothing would change between them, but something did. It wasn't really a difference in personality, or the way they treated him. It just happened that every now and then after a D&D night or movie night with El and Max or in general a group hangout, he'd walk away with a brand new bottle of nail color.

First, a dark emerald green was handed to him by El during one of their sleepovers. He had looked at her questioningly for only a moment before concluding to himself that of course Mike must've let his secret slip. Looking into Eleven's imploring gaze and being demanded to speak pretty much leaves you out of options but to oblige. When he asked if she didn't want it anymore she shook her head and her lips twitched into a small smile. She said it was given to her during her makeover from Chicago, and while she still thinks she looked "bitchin'" she decided she didn't really like green that well, and it reminded her of the specks of green in his eyes, so she brought it over. It turns out it compliments his skin tone really well.

After that there's a bright red from Dustin ("My mom was cleaning out her vanity, here!"), a sun yellow from Lucas (Erica got a ten-pack for her birthday and she hates yellow, but I thought you might find some use for it, so,"), Max gets him a clear coat ("To protect the paint underneath, or just for a gloss, ya know?"), and Mike, well, his explanation was a little less to the point.

"Hey, Will?" Mike spoke into the comfortable silence that enveloped them in Will's room. They were doing what they usually did on days that Will sees the doctors. Enjoying each other's company in the safety of the Byers' home, with sketchbooks and comics to keep them occupied. These nights are when he and Will are the most relaxed, so of course Mike should have expected Will to pick up on the nervousness in his tone and stare him down immediately from his

place on his bed. His heart rate picks up as he continues, "I brought you something, um..."

He grabs his bag lying next to him on the floor and fumbles with the zipper and digs through the pencils and stray papers in the front pocket while Will watches with an easy balance of patience and curiosity that Mike remembers him always possessing.

Will zones into Mike's hands when he hears a tiny victorious "Aha!", raising his eyebrows and smirking at what he pulls out. "You brought me nail polish?"

Mike's smile turns shy and a blush starts to tinge the tip of his ears, "Uh, y-yeah, I mean, I know you like it and Nancy had some laying around in the bathroom and it, uh, reminded me of you and then I started looking at some of the colors and this one-" He climbs next to Will on the bed and pushes the bottle of a rosy peachy cream color into his hand, "-made me think of you when you, um, when you smile and I remember you saying nail polish makes you happy so I just thought, I don't know, I just thought that you'd, um," He clears his throat and watches as Will pulls the bottle closer to his face to inspect the color, finishing his ramble with a much softer voice, "that you'd like it."

Will cradles the bottle in both of his hands, turning it over and back again. He can feel heat rising to his cheeks and his lips pulling upwards. He looks up at Mike with shining eyes, "It reminds you of my smile?"

Mike is looking at him with the softest eyes and an even softer smile, and he swears his heart is about to beat out of his chest when he reaches up and brushes Will's cheek, "Yeah, just like that."

Will covers Mike's hand with his, ignoring all the frantic butterflies in his belly. He inhales shakily before bringing Mike's hand down and holding it in his own. He studies their hands and utters quietly, "I'm right-handed." Before putting the bottle back in Mike's hand.

He glances up at Mike's befuddled and hurt expression, smiling softly and reaching his right hand out and letting it hover between them, "Mind helping me paint them?"

Immediately Mike's expression is wiped clean of any pain and is replaced with what Will can only describe as pure joy. Mike opens the bottle, setting it down on a textbook that Will grabbed from his nightstand before reaching his left hand out and gently placing it palm up against Will's hand. They smile at each other, and Mike gets to work.

He doesn't think he's ever seen a color more beautiful on Will.

Author's Note:

-and everything was jolly and Will the Wise and Beautiful was never hurt again. :)

Works inspired by this one:

- [Nail Polish](#) by [asexualjuliet](#)